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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR S/EX-CR, S/EX-O

STATE FOR EAP/MLS

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER WRITES TO SECRETARY ON
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS ASSISTANCE

1. (SBU) On December 29, under cover of MFA Note 593 NG-CM, Post received a letter and "memo" from Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nien to the Secretary on the subject of U.S. assistance to the Central Highlands. In brief, Foreign Minister Nien expresses regret that the U.S. Congress earmarked funds for the region without consulting with Vietnam. The FM further rejects the Montagnard Development Project or "any of the like" as development partners, but welcomes consultations with the USG on possible "appropriate" development activities in the Central Highlands. Post will pouch to EAP/MLS the original letter and memo.

2. (SBU) Begin verbatim text of letter:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Socialist Republic of Vietnam

December 28, 2005

Her Excellency Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Honorable Secretary,

It was brought to my attention that the United States Congress has passed an appropriation bill which included a provision making available funds for programs and activities for the Central Highlands region of Vietnam. The supposed amount is 2 million USD, up to one million of which is expected to be provided to the Montagnard Development Project.

I am aware that certain issues regarding the Central Highlands region of Vietnam attract quite an amount of attention in the United States and the evolving of which does have implication on the overall relationship between Vietnam and the United States. In this regard, I would like to affirm that our government pays special attention to the socio-economic development of the Central Highlands region. The efforts we made during the last years have yielded encouraging results. This year all the 5 provinces of this region have overcome a serious drought and achieved high economic growth, among them Dak Lak is leading with a rate of 8 percent. The lives of ethnic minorities have also improved, with greater social services being provided. Those who have returned from Cambodia have also resettled back into their normal life. Religious festivities during the holiday seasons are taking place throughout the region.

Nonetheless, the region is still coping with many problems, especially the matter of achieving sustainable economic development and narrowing the gap between urban area and rural area, where the majority of the ethnic minorities reside. In this spirit, we welcome assistance from the international community, particularly projects that contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic situation in the region. The Management Board for the development of Central Highlands, the central agency charged with improving the socio-economic development of the Central Highlands provinces, is the appropriate body in which cooperative activities can be discussed.

As with regard to the above bill-passage, it is regrettable that such a decision affecting Vietnam has been made without consultation with our side. Furthermore, we have strong reasons to believe that the Montagnard Development Project is drawn up in such a way that is not constructive to the enhancement of the socio-economic situation in the Central Highlands. For this reason, we will not be able to welcome the Montagnard Development Project or any of the like. We are further concerned that should funding be given to this project, it would send a wrong signal about U.S. commitment to and would surely hinder the further enhancement of U.S.-Vietnam relations.

I am writing this letter to inform of our concern and suggest that you work with us to find a satisfactory and practical way to approach this matter. The best way is to be in line with the procedure and with the laws of Vietnam. The Americas Department of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs will provide the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam with information to help in this regard.

I am very much impressed by the meeting with Your Excellency in Busan (ROK) and thankful for your valuable time and I look forward to welcoming your Assistant Secretary Mr. Barry Lowenkron and Ambassador John Hanford to Vietnam.

I wish to affirm my commitment to working with you to address matters of mutual concern in a forthright manner.

With highest regards,
Yours sincerely,
//s//
Nguyen Dy Nien

End text of letter.

13. (SBU) Begin verbatim text of memo:

MEMO

-- The Government of the S.R. of Vietnam pays special attention to the socio-economic development of the Central Highlands region of Vietnam. We welcome assistance from the international community in this regard.

-- Vietnam-U.S. relations have aspects that concern the Central Highlands, ones that should be worked with in accordance with the spirit of the Joint Statement reached in June 21st, 2005, between Vietnamese Prime Minister H.E. Phan Van Khai and U.S. President H.E. Mr. George W. Bush.

-- A provision of U.S. public law No. 109-102 (H.R. 3057) making available funds for programs and activities for the Central Highlands of Vietnam has been made without due consultation with the Vietnamese side. Reference in this law's relating documentation to the Montagnard Development Project, one that is drawn up in such a way not constructive to the enhancement of socio-economic situation in the Central Highlands, further indicates that the implementation of the said-project could potentially hinder the further enhancement of U.S.-Vietnam relations.

-- The Government of the S.R. of Vietnam and local authorities in the Central Highlands will not welcome the Montagnard Development Project or any of the like and is opposed to any activity conducted without consultation with Vietnam.

-- The Government of the S.R. of Vietnam is willing to cooperate with the United States Government on this matter. However, we will welcome only projects that contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic situation in the region. The Management Board for the development of Central Highlands, the central agency charged with improving the socio-economic development of the Central Highlands is the appropriate body in which cooperative activities can be discussed. NGOs who are given license to operate in Vietnam and have projects contributing to the socio-economic situation of the region that are approved by provincial authorities will be welcomed.

December 2005

End text of memo.

MARINE